



129 Hannah Höch, *Mutter: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (Mother: From an Ethnographic Museum), 1930, 18 x 24 cm., photomontage, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

from an
ethnographic
museum

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Several critics have argued that Höch's post-Dada works lack the political intensity of those made alongside Heartfield, Hausmann, and Grosz. Critic Manuela Hoelterhoff, for example, contrasts Höch's work unfavorably with Heartfield's, even denying Höch's work any political meaning:

Hannah Höch continued to devote herself to the photomontage, but her work bears little similarity to Heartfield's. She is certainly a whimsical observer of social conventions, but her ideological commitment is nil. What happened when both of them, presumably accidentally, used the same photograph of a listless, overworked and pregnant proletarian woman in 1930, is fascinating to note. In *Mothers, Let Your Sons Live!* [fig. 130] Heartfield montages a photograph of a dead boy with his rifle, right behind the woman. The message is clear – agitate for change! Rouse yourself! Help prevent these kinds of atrocities! In contrast, Höch has no sense of mission. She cloaks the woman's face surrealistically, with a primitive mask, thereby deflecting the impact of the original photograph. *La Mère* [sic] is possibly an affecting but not a politically engaged image.¹

Although it is true that Höch's work does not convey the explicit and often prescriptive political messages of Heartfield's photomontages, it is important to recognize that other political strategies were available. As we have seen, Höch developed a sophisticated critical language of social commentary concerning the typology and conditions of the modern woman.

The highly political nature of this project is particularly evident in her extended photomontage series "From an Ethnographic Museum," on which she worked inter-

Hoch's political focus changed to commentaries on social typology + conditions of the Modern Woman

mittently from 1924 until at least her Czech exhibition in 1934. In the example Hoelterhoff cites, *Mutter: Aus einem Ethnographischen Museum*, 1930 (fig. 129), the photomontage does in fact signify politically on several related levels. By covering the pregnant proletarian mother's face with a tribal mask, Höch allegorically realigned this stereotype of exhausted maternity, associating it with "primitive" art and possibly suggesting the proletariat woman as a kind of Ur-mother. And Höch added a modish, New Woman's eye to one side of the face, again perhaps alluding to a kind of universal femininity. Moreover, the addition of the mask further designates the pregnant, discouraged figure as "Other." In addition, *Mutter* connotes a specific political issue: pregnancy itself, represented in the context of proletarian exhaustion, is a clear reference to the broad-based battle then going on in Weimar over an act called Paragraph 218, which outlawed abortion.² The working-class woman was a prevalent symbol in the fight to legalize abortion since her poverty made unwanted pregnancies and births especially cruel. Höch participated in the campaign to overturn Paragraph 218 by contributing to the *Frauen in Not* (Women in Need) exhibition. And Höch had had two illegal abortions herself. Whether linked to a specific political event or not, Höch's works can be described as political in their challenging reconfigurations of contemporary female stereotypes.

In general, the photomontages in Höch's Ethnographic Museum series combine signs of collected and categorized ethnographic objects with those of contemporary women. The series, which Höch also called "der Sammlung" or "the collection," consists of eighteen to twenty works made over a period of more than five years. These include: *Masken*, c. 1924; *Entführung*, 1925; *Trauer*, 1925; *Denkmal I (Nr. VIII)*, c. 1925; *Mit Mütze*, c. 1925; *Die Süsse*, before 1926; *Nummer IX (Zwei)*, c. 1926; *Hörner (Nr. X)*, c. 1926; *Denkmal II: Eitelkeit*, 1926; *Der heilige Berg*, 1927; *Negerplastik*, 1929; *Fremde Schönheit*, c. 1929; *Untitled*, 1930; *Mutter*, 1930; *Indische Tänzerin*, 1930; *Untitled*, c. 1930; *Buddha*, c. 1930; and *Untitled* (Kunst-Sammlung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), c. 1930; and possibly other related works (figs. 131, 132).³ It is doubtful that all of the montages of the Ethnographic Museum series were ever exhibited together, though Höch included twelve of them in her one-person photomontage exhibition in Brno in 1934.⁴

W. Höch 1924
Höch's few political
remain more explicit
than those concerning
race & ethnography

+ used ethno
material to comment
on European gender
issues and different
about ethno practices

If Höch's politics concerning women are legible, her politics on race and ethnography as represented in the Ethnographic Museum series are less clear. An exploration of the ways in which her representations of women and ethnography function independently and intersect partially illuminates her intentions. In the series, Höch was not particularly critical of contemporary ethnographic attitudes; instead, she used images of tribal objects and the exhibition format in ethnographic museums almost exclusively to comment on contemporary European gender definitions. Höch never substantively or explicitly challenged contemporary racist or colonialist ideas, although her irony often functions as implicit criticism. If, as Hoelterhoff suggests, some of Höch's montages are "whimsical," more are sharply ironic. But even the whimsy Höch employed satirizes the notion of primitivism as somehow analogous



130 John Heartfield, *Zwangslieferantin von Menschenmaterial Nur Mut! Der Staat braucht Arbeitslose und Soldaten!* (Forced supplier of human ammunition! Take courage! The state needs unemployed and soldiers!), *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* 9, no. 10, 1930, page 183, 38.2 x 28 cm., Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



131 Hannah Höch, *Lustige Person* (Jovial Person), 1932, 18.5 x 24.5 cm., photomontage



132 Hannah Höch, *Geld* (Money), c. 1922, 10 x 17.5 cm., photomontage, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart

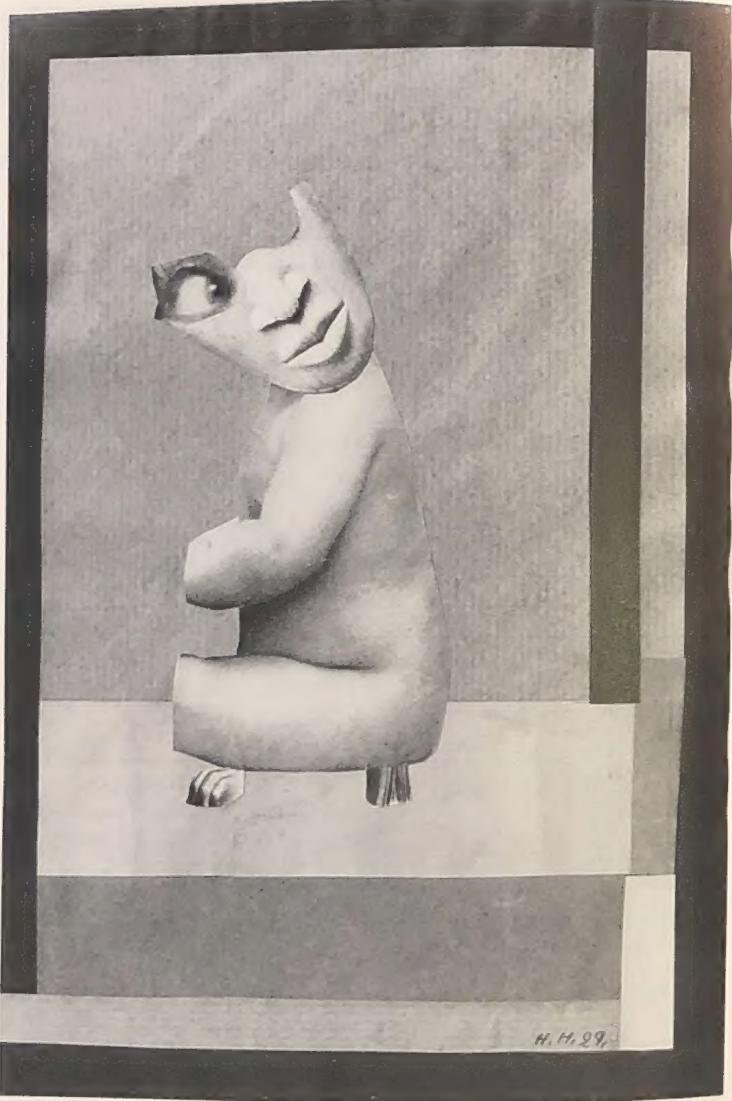
to the primordial creativity embedded in the spirit of the artist (an attitude evident in some of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's paintings, for example).⁵ As Höch later wrote of the series, "The expansion of ethnographic research at that time only took in the 'primitives,' especially Negro art. The German Expressionists manifested this often in their oil paintings. I enjoyed experimenting in a less serious, but always precise, way with this material."⁶

Höch was careful in this statement to distinguish her intentions from those of the German Expressionists. In the Ethnographic Museum series as well as her scrapbook, however, she also participated in the rather derogatory trend toward romanticized negrophilia. In the work Höch referred to as *Kinderkörper Negerplastikkopf* (Children's Body/Negro Sculpture Head) or simply *Negerplastik*, 1929 (fig. 133),⁷ Höch placed an image of a carved African head over a photograph of a baby's body. The head is, in fact, an ivory pendant mask from the court of Benin, most likely one now in the British Museum. The great size of the head, in addition to the softness of the body, the wide-open eye, and the way the head is cocked to one side as if in surprise all give the figure a quality of childlessness. Although one eye is cut out and the other is covered with a large, made-up woman's eye, the scale relationships between head and body are not interrupted; even the truncated arm and leg do not diminish the representation of the figure's childlike proportions. Of course, the suggested equation of infantilism with primitivism and Africanness reiterates a familiar stereotype from *Illustrierte photoreportage of Africa*.⁸ Yet even in this childlike image, there is a critical subtext. Höch used the base on which the figure is perched (a miniature stool in the lower right and a small claw in the lower left) as a frame within a frame. This important device, deployed throughout the Ethnographic Museum series, makes an ironic comment on the categorization and display of people as objects. The base, which traditionally presents the wholeness and perfection of an object on display, is used by Höch in these works as a pedestal for her fragmentary, grotesque, and sometimes humorous montages of multi-cultural fragments. Mocking the ideal of plenitude, with its illusion of homogenization (difference subsumed by wholeness), the discordance of Höch's montages raises fundamentally political issues regarding the representation of race and gender.

Where Höch diverged from the use of primitivism in the works of the Expressionists and other contemporaries is in her ironic focus on Western representation of racial difference and its application to gender politics. To counter such rigid characterizations, Höch created allegories of modern femininity, montages that often overtly criticize aspects of the status and representation of Weimar women. Among the more explicit allegorical critiques in Höch's Ethnographic Museum series are *Indische Tänzerin* (Indian Female Dancer), 1930 (fig. 134) and *Fremde Schönheit*, (Strange Beauty), c. 1929 (fig. 135).⁹ In *Indische Tänzerin*, a woman's head is thrown back and half of the face of an Indian statue is clamped over her mouth and right eye. For a headdress, she wears multiple cut-out silhouettes of knives and spoons. The resulting composite figure is recognizable as a modern woman by her haircut, a trendy *Bunibokf*, the short bangs of which are visible beneath the silverware tiara. The front-

commenting on display
of people as objects

racial difference
analogous to
gender politics



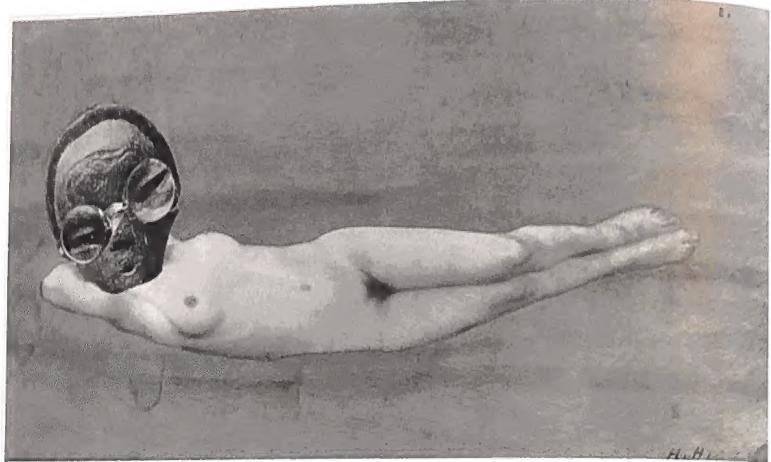
133 Hannah Höch, *Negerplastik* (Negro Sculpture), from the series *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (From an Ethnographic Museum), 1929, 26 x 17.5 cm., private collection

from an ethnographic museum
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134 Hannah Höch, *Indische Tänzerin: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (Indian Female Dancer: From an Ethnographic Museum), 1930, 10 1/4 x 8 7/8 in., photomontage, the Museum of Modern Art, New York (pl. 13)

from an ethnographic museum
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135 Hannah Höch, *Fremde Schönheit* (Strange Beauty), 1929, 32 x 23 cm., photomontage, private collection, Paris

*frustrating New
woman but
perpetuating old
stereotypes*

tality of the sculpture face (positioned parallel to the picture plane) superimposed over the backward inclination of the head gives the juxtaposition the connotations of oppression and calcification. Certainly the headdress, with its combination of honorific and militaristic connotations, is a double-edged joke; while crowning the New Woman, its use of table settings secures her identity with the domestic emblems of the stereotypic drudgery of a housewife.¹⁰ The source for the face of the woman is a fan photo of the popular actress Marie Falconetti portraying the title role in Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 film, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (The Passion of Joan of Arc). There are many layers of feminine identity here – film star, heroic battle maiden, modern woman – all cloaked in the garb of domesticity.

In a similar way, Höch used the photomontage *Fremde Schönheit*, c. 1929, to question contemporary norms of feminine beauty. A photograph of a young, naked white woman in a traditional alluring pose – lying on her side with one elbow angled behind her head – is dramatically surmounted by a dark, grotesquely wrinkled, possibly shrunken head. To further exaggerate this shocking juxtaposition, Höch added to the face a pair of skewed eyes, magnified by eyeglasses that distort the figure's gaze and in turn emphasize the viewer's own act of looking at the figure's eyes, face, and body.

*arbitrariness of beauty
beauty is a natural
cultural construct
not a natural given*

Art historian Annegret Jürgens-Kirchoff has argued persuasively that Höch's use of montage in *Fremde Schönheit* demonstrates the arbitrariness of all canons of beauty, both familiar and exotic. By rendering beauty strange, she asserts, Höch revealed the representation of beauty as a cultural formula rather than a natural given. By combining the beautiful and the grotesque, Höch blurred the boundaries between different aesthetic categories of representations of the body. Jürgens-Kirchoff

Montage blurs alienating effect

quotes Höch's own statement published in conjunction with a 1929 exhibition in The Hague: "Ich möchte die festen grenzen verwischen, die wir menschen, selbstsicher, um alles uns erreichbare zu ziehen geneigt sind" (I want to blur the firm boundaries that we as people tend self-assuredly to draw around all that we can achieve).¹¹

Through the alienation effect of montage, both the European body and the tribal shrunken head (or grotesque mask) appear strange. Specifically in many of Höch's Ethnographic Museum montages and androgynous works, it is the New Woman as icon that is fractured, brought into question, and made to appear as a construction.¹² But the New Woman is not parodied; rather, contemporary femininity is paired disturbingly with the grotesque in such a way that differences and similarities are blurred.¹³ If one interprets *Fremde Schönheit* as a statement about the contradictions and arbitrariness of canons of feminine beauty and operations of the gaze, then one is reading the montage as an allegory; many montages in the Ethnographic Museum series lend themselves to such readings.

The use of tribal objects and references immediately invokes the embattled tradition of Western ethnographic interpretation. Poised between scientific "objectivity" and a sort of moralistic storytelling, ethnographic representations are, according to anthropologist James Clifford, often thinly masked allegories. "Allegory prompts us to say of any cultural description," Clifford writes, "not 'this represents or symbolizes that' but rather, 'this is a (morally charged) story about that.'"¹⁴ This comparative mode, Clifford points out, is a fundamentally humanistic one, producing "controlled fictions of difference and similitude"¹⁵ in which the standard for locating either the self or the Other is a universalizing humanism. Clifford also describes how many ethnographic writings establish distance through the use of irony: "We note ... the ironic structure (which need not imply an ironic tone) of such allegories," he writes. "For they are presented through the detour of an ethnographic subjectivity whose attitude toward the other is one of participant-observer, or better perhaps, belief-skepticism."¹⁶

What might be perceived as Höch's humanistic linking of the subjecthood of Western and tribal peoples through montaging body parts (or often ethnographic artifact fragments representing body parts) is made ironic through her use of allegorical displacement. In structure as well as in tone, her exploration of self through a representation of the Other is explicitly ironic. Because of the fluid operations of reading a montage, however – the Blochian flowering of allegory – such a distanced irony is not a static or ever-present element of reception. With corporeal identification, the figure in *Fremde Schönheit* can also seem disturbingly close and grotesque – uncanny. Oscillation is therefore important in Höch's montages – prompting a disjunctive shift between one allegorical reading and another, allowing different types of identification and distance.

Late in life, Höch recalled that the series "Aus einem Ethnographischen Museum" had been inspired by a visit she made with Kurt Schwitters to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum Te Leiden.¹⁷ This visit took place in 1926, but certain of Höch's ethnographic montages may have actually been made earlier, predating the idea of

*Humanizing the
experience*

the series or collection.¹⁸ Grete König remembers that Höch was interested in ethnography during the Berlin Dada years: "She had a great interest in Negro sculpture, and in all ethnographic things. That did not have to do with Til. It was from the Hausmann times; she retained a lot from then."¹⁹ Whether or not the series originated with the visit to the Leiden ethnographic museum, the concept of the ethnographic museum as an institution was important to Höch's creation of the series.²⁰

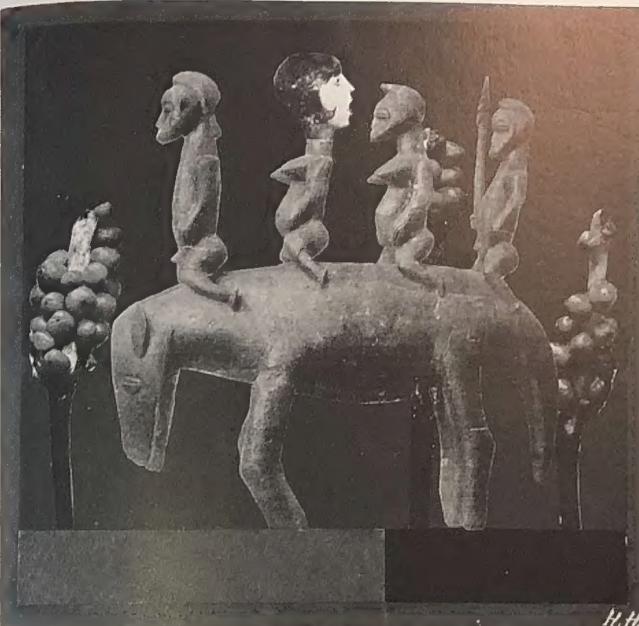
It is useful, then, to look back at the Leiden museum as it was in 1926 and to consider the nature and meaning of ethnographic display.²¹ In 1926, the African collection of the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum Te Leiden (which changed its name in 1931 to Rijksmuseum van Ethnographie and in 1935 to Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde) were housed in the museum building on the Heerengracht.²² Separate buildings contained ethnographic collections from Africa, the Far East, the South Sea Islands, and other regions. Although catalogs from these years show mainly photographs of isolated objects, they do include pictures of some objects displayed as if in everyday use, for example, placed in and around huts.²³ One photograph, of Buddhas in the museum garden (an image Höch used in her scrapbook), illustrates an effort to recreate the "spirit" of an anthropological setting.

Occasionally, the museum included life-size mannequins in its anthropological dioramas, demonstrating how various tribes dressed and used tools. Viewers of such anthropological mise-en-scènes in the 1920s would undoubtedly have made two associations: with commercial mannequins, usually female, in department store windows and with actual humans once displayed in international expositions, theaters, and even zoos.

Although mannequins were widely used in the 1920s, they were still enough of a novelty to warrant extensive photographic documentation in the mass media and advertising trade journals.²⁴ Their presence in an ethnographic diorama suggests an odd equation between the store mannequin as bearer of commodity fetishes and the museum mannequin as bearer of tribal fetishes. But in her photomontage series, Höch avoided any simple equation between tribal and commodity fetishism. Instead, these associations are combined with fragments of tribal objects placed on bases (referring to the ethnographic museum) and with fragments of Western female bodies (referring directly to shop window displays). Although any framing of ethnographic objects as commodities in Höch's series inevitably raises the specter of nineteenth-century colonialism, these connotations are viewed through various representations of the feminine, particularly the New Woman as mannequin and object of ethnographic inquiry.

The second and more shocking association raised by ethnographic museum mannequins was a bizarre exhibition and zoological practice common in turn-of-the-century Europe, something a 1920s viewer might have remembered from childhood. As cultural historian Sander Gilman has documented, non-European tribal peoples were actually put on display in ethnological settings in zoos in Vienna and elsewhere in Europe, including Germany. Gilman notes that "the 'ethnological' exhibition was a natural extension of the ethnographic museum, placing living 'exotics' within the

fragments of
Ethnographic
New Woman



136 Hannah Höch, *Entführung: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (Abduction: From an Ethnographic Museum), 1925, 19.5 x 20 cm., photomontage, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (pl. 14)

daily experience of the European." Peter Altenberg's 1897 novel, *Ashantee*, about Africans on exhibit in an Austrian zoo, describes this practice: "In the zoological garden there stands a cage inhabited by exotic beasts from the Amazon, two pampas hares, sitting quite humanlike on their haunches nibbling the sweets tossed to them by the crowd. Next to this cage are the Ashantis, seen performing a native dance."²⁵

A key element in Höch's highlighting these issues of acquisition and display of the Other was the representation of sculptural bases within the montages. In *Entführung* (Abduction), 1925 (fig. 136), Höch situated a German New Woman within a distinctly African narrative, represented by a tribal object set on a prominent base. The central image, a wooden African sculpture entitled *The Abduction of the Virgins*, derives from BIZ.²⁶ In the BIZ photograph (fig. 137), the sculpture sits on a base with nothing in the background, suggesting a museum display. The sculpture consists of two carved male figures, one carrying a spear, transporting two female figures between them; all four figures ride on an oversized animal statue, probably



137 "Raub der Jungfrauen," (Abduction of the virgins)
Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung 33, no. 38 (Sept. 21, 1924):
 1095

representing an elephant. Höch carefully cut out the reproduction along the contours of the sculpture, then placed the image on an even larger base, added to the dark blue background three cherry red fruit trees (which look like cartoon versions of jungle foliage), and substituted a New Woman's face for one of the female heads. The New Woman, recognizable by her modern hair style, is twisted around so that her head is backwards and her mouth is open as if she is yelling, making the whole narrative slightly ridiculous. The abstract wooden faces of the African sculpture are by contrast placid, expressionless, and facing forward.

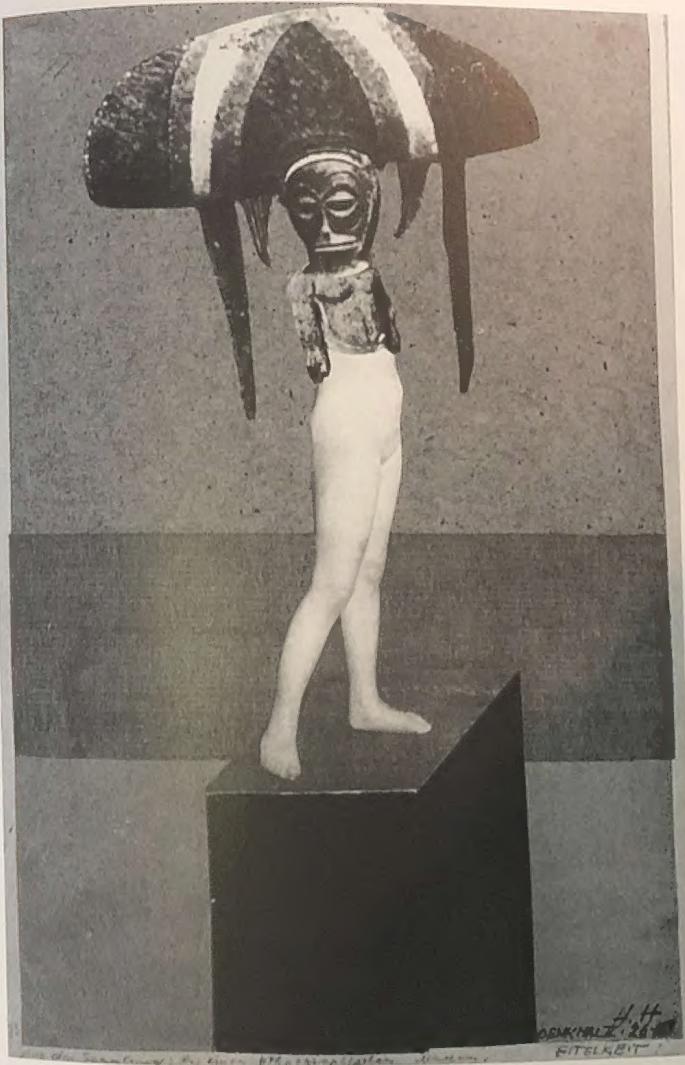
frame within a frame

It is an ironic joke: the replacement of an image of the Other with one of self. Although inclusion suggests similarity, ironic humor suggests distance and difference, and the composition invokes a shifting between these two attitudes. The base, with its museum connotations, puts the whole scene on display, offers it for containment and categorization, and provides a frame within a frame for the narrative, which is itself about entrapment and abduction.

*from a tall base (with a frame)
 of the Other
 with modern femininity*

In other works in the Ethnographic Museum series, the base fortifies the allegorical reading of the images, linking the concept of the religious fetish or ethnographic object on display with modern femininity and even androgyny. In *Denkmal II: Eitelkeit* (Monument II: Vanity), 1926 (fig. 138), a figure poses on a tall base (which stretches from below the frame to above the horizon) in a classical posture of self-display, turned three-quarters in contrapposto, against a background of pink and blue colored papers.²⁷ From the waist down, the figure is a seminude female, but its chest and dwarfed arms are male. This androgynous personage produces a temporarily unsettling oscillation in the gender identity of the engaged viewer.

The head, an African mask, bears a wide, fanned headdress. This dominant photographic image appeared in the June 1930 issue of *Uhu* (fig. 139), where its caption read: "The medicine man: Masked dancer and sorcerer of the African Masai tribe."²⁸ In the magazine, the African image not only provides the seductive photographic illustration of the text; it also draws a parallel between the Western magician and the African medicine man. The photograph is particularly apt: instead of making



138 Hannah Höch, *Denkmal II: Eitelkeit* (Monument II: Vanity), from the series *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (From an Ethnographic Museum), 1926, 25.8 x 16.7 cm., Collection: Rössner-Höch, Backnang, Germany (pl. 15)



139 "The medicine man," *Uhu* (June 1930): 56.
Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen Preussischer
Kulturbesitz Berlin

the African medicine man exotic, it shows him sitting in an everyday pose of rest and contemplation, dressed to practice his trade, with villagers and huts in the distance. It is Höch who made the image exotic by appropriating the medicine man's symbolic headgear and recontextualizing it within the frame of the sculptural monument or museum display. She has also given the figure human legs, which make it appear to display him/herself. Hence the title *Vanity*. If Höch retained any sense of the magical and religious from the original *Uhu* photograph, it is here mixed with parodic commentary on the vanity of monuments and self-display.

The tension that Höch established between self-display (one that follows the patriarchal dictate to women to redefine their bodies as commodities or to men to embody the phallus-power) and selflessness (according to European myths about African religion as embodied in their art objects) was discussed at the time in terms of transcendence and anonymity. In particular, these ideas were identified with the work of the cultural critic Carl Einstein, author of the first German book devoted to African sculpture, *Negerplastik* (1915), and a member of the same Dada and proto-Dada circles as Höch and Hausmann. Einstein co-edited the Dada journals *Der blutige Ernst* (Bloody Seriousness) and *Der Pleite* (Bankruptcy) with George Grosz and John Heartfield in 1919. As a tribute to Einstein, Hausmann created an abstract woodcut cover for his copy of *Negerplastik*.²⁹ Both Hausmann and Höch probably knew Einstein personally. Given Höch's interest in ethnography, chances are that she had read *Negerplastik* and his later *Afrikanische Plastik* (1921).

One idea in Einstein's work that may have engaged Höch was the tension he

established between individualism and anti-individualism. In *Negerplastik*, Einstein wrote of African masks: "With this transformation he [the mask-wearer] becomes a balance to negating adoration. He prays to the god, performs an ecstatic tribal dance, and the mask transforms him into both the god and the tribe. This transformation gives him the most powerful idea of the objective; he incarnates the objective itself and becomes that in which all particularities are destroyed. Therefore the mask only makes sense when it is inhuman and impersonal; that is, constructive and free from the experience of the individual. It is possible that he reveres the mask as a deity when he is not wearing it."³⁰

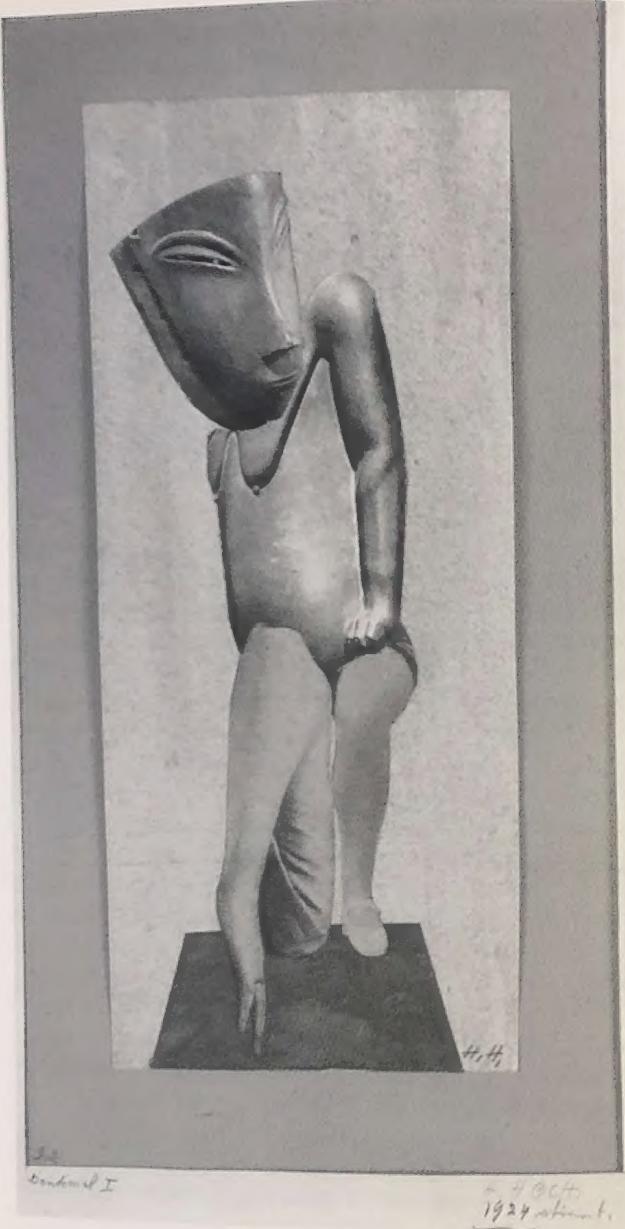
Einstein generally disavowed ethnography and in his discussion of African religion saw primitive art as the carrier of a condensed spirituality. He attributed this same spirituality to Western contemporary art.³¹ In a similar fashion, Höch placed emblematic images in settings that refer to the ethnographic museum, not to their original tribal context. At times she retained their spiritual connotations even while employing them for cultural critique. This is in keeping with Höch's own interest in spirituality, one that is evident from her scrapbook as well as her correspondence with the artists Otto Freundlich and Thomas Ring.³²

Einstein describes the function of art within African religion as one universal, monolithic practice: "Negro art is, above all else, religiously intended. Artworks are revered, as in any ancient community. The creator fashions his objects to be the divinity or its custodian, that means he possesses an initial and lasting distance from the object based on the fact that it is or contains the god. His work must be characterized as religious service."³³ In *Afrikanische Plastik*, Einstein decries the use of the word "fetish" as vague and meaningless.³⁴ Nevertheless, Einstein retains the concept of African art objects as religious fetishes and links it to his formalist analyses, providing a moral claim for his methodology.

Hoch recontextualizes the ethos, - it finds its setting in the West

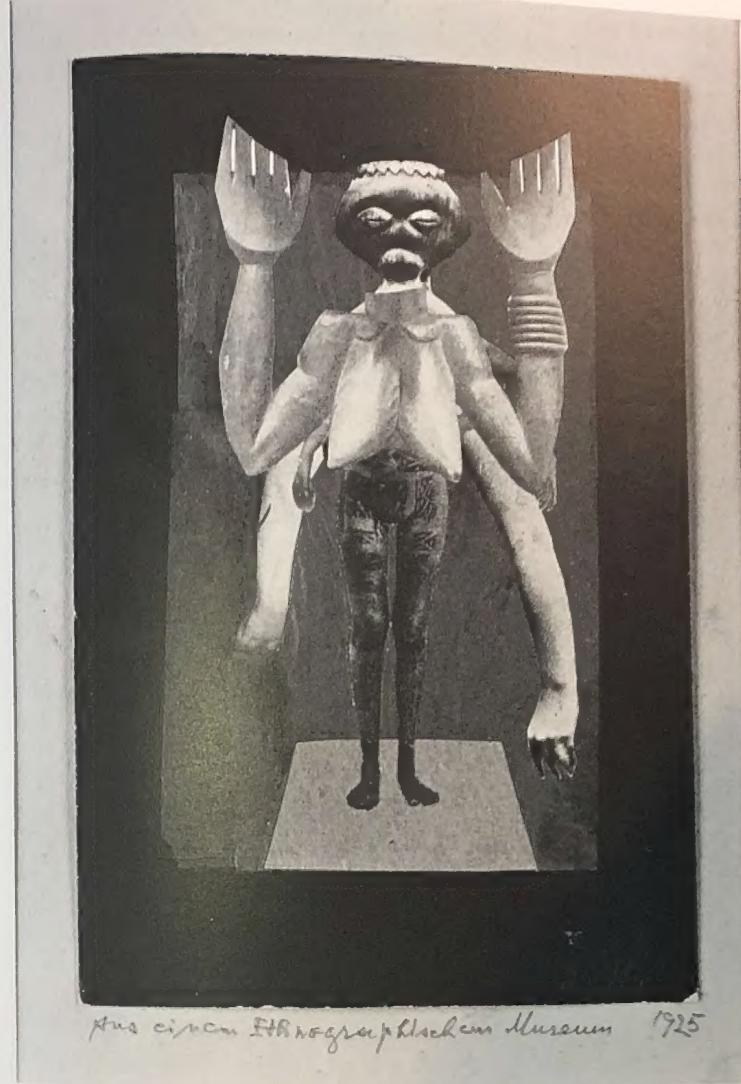
Einstein's ideas of tribal art as religious fetishes and as embodiments of the magical and the spiritual are addressed throughout Höch's Ethnographic Museum series, most notably in *Denkmal II: Eitelkeit* (Monument II: Vanity), 1926; *Denkmal I* (Nr. VIII) (Monument [No. VIII]), c. 1925 (fig. 140); *Untitled* (Kunst-Sammlung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), c. 1930; and *Trauer* (Sadness), 1925 (fig. 141). But these ideas vie for importance with her own ironic commentaries on femininity. The "primitive" sculpture is always combined with body parts of modern European women, often with jarring or grotesque results.

In *Monument I*, perhaps the most grotesque work in the entire series, the figure's sculptural trunk (with flattened, stylized breasts) has an amphibious quality. The "monument" has three montaged legs: one is unidentifiable as human, but its "foot" looks like an animal hoof; another is attached from behind and appears to be a trousered leg, perhaps amputated at the knee (extra trouser material is folded upward at the end); the third is a woman's leg wearing a dancing shoe. The "woman" appears to shrug one shoulder, lurch forward, and look askance. Both tense and flaccid, she digs her chin into her chest and clenches her fist. The face is an abstract sculptural mask, with long, slit eyelids through which eyes are just barely visible,



140 Hannah Höch, *Denkmal I: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (Monument I: From an Ethnographic Museum), 1924, 19.6 × 15.5 cm., photomontage, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (pl. 16)

from an ethnographic museum
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141 Hannah Höch, *Trauer: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (Sadness: From an Ethnographic Museum), 1925, 17.6 × 11.5 cm., photomontage, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (pl. 17)

from an ethnographic museum
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giving the face a mysterious expression. The figure stands on a base or platform. The slinking, ungainly quality of the body is a bitter comment on the heroic pose of the (usually male) figure commemorated in the conventional monument. The standard heroic pose is supplanted here by a self-denigrating one with the head buried in the chest, a shoulder uncomfortably raised, the body misshapen. The effect is one of turmoil, black humor, and an inwardly inflected anger. If it were not for the barely visible eyes and the tangled posture, this would be merely a grotesque figure without identification for the viewer. But these attributes, together with the New Woman's leg, argue for a reading of this image that involves a threatening degree of closeness for the female viewer.

Trauer, though also a portrait of misshapen femininity, appears less corporeal and more sculptural and is therefore less disturbing. The androgynous, multilimbed figure is displayed frontally, almost symmetrically, connoting the solemnity of a tribal fetish – in this case borrowed as a Western emblem. The cutout reproduction of a carved head is made to seem continuous and in scale with a photograph of a tribal man visible from the waist down. Two very small white arms and hands, also in scale, dangle from the body's sides and are raised slightly in a graceful gesture. Behind these arms are two larger out-of-scale arms, probably female but unmatched. Layered over the tiny dangling hands, almost obliterating them, is a photograph of a sculptured torso with pendulous breasts and huge, upraised wooden hands. These hands extend beyond edges of the rectangular background, as if pushing the pictorial boundaries of the composition.

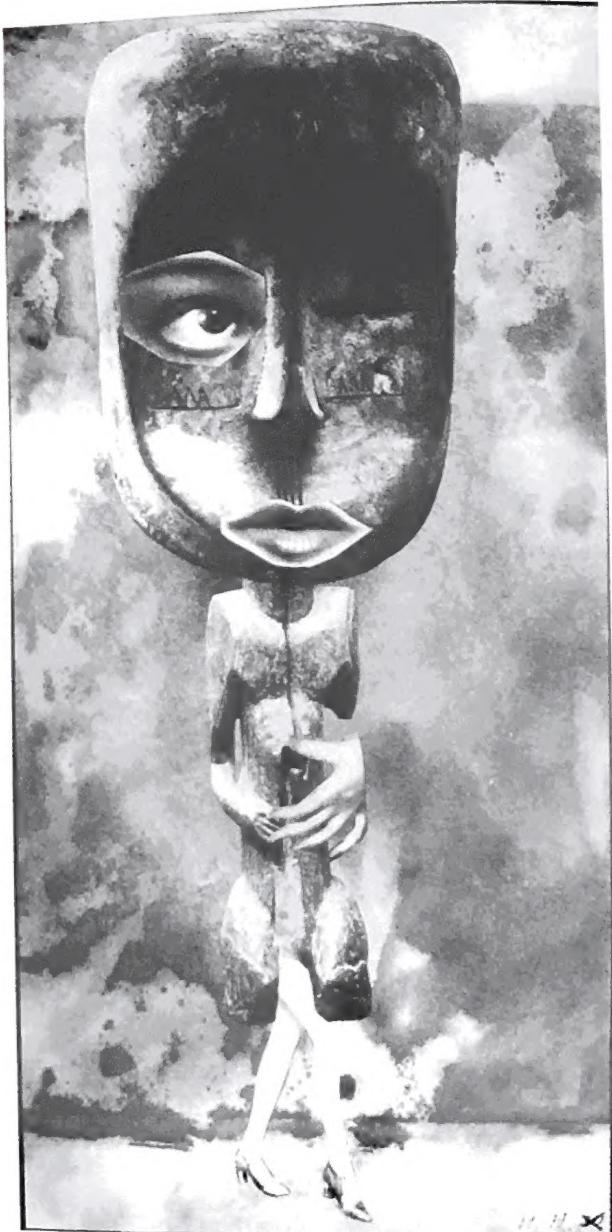
In *Trauer*, the androgyny of the figure seems to indicate not only unstable gender identity but also the Otherness of tribal magic. The body's male and female sexual organs are both marked as tribal (taken from images of tribal sculpture and costume), and together they form part of a fetish figure that seems to stand in front of and overwhelm the European women (signified by the two sets of hands and arms); the smallest figure seems almost completely engulfed. Tribal spirituality and anonymity appear to be adorned with an emblematic expression of sadness, as if, as Einstein would have it, the wearer of the tribal mask embodies the deity of sadness. In *Trauer*, Höch ambitiously combined elements of several different cultures and genders as well as the animate and the inanimate to create an imaginary fetishlike object. Eerily, the actual female limbs, though adorned by the ethnographic fragments, are superfluous: engulfed, they are both too contained and too excessive.

In *Untitled*, (fig. 142) a figure rises up out of a pyramid base that seems like a skirt or a part of the body. The torso and head are cut from a photograph of an ethnographic sculpture. The head with exaggerated eyebrows and a tusk through the nose seem masculine. The torso is overlaid with a European woman's nude breasts and arms, perfectly in proportion with the sculpture as if she is wearing them. In this display of sexuality and exoticism, a delicate fitting together of parts, the figure is not grotesque but curious, *fremd*.

At times, Höch's figures or "monuments" seem to play a double role, as weird ethnographic composite fetishes and as a psychosexual phallic fetishes. By titling two



142 Hannah Höch, *Untitled*, from the series "Aus einem ethnographischen Museum" (From an Ethnographic Museum), 1929, photomontage, 49 x 32.5 cm., Kunstsammlung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn



143 Hannah Höch, *Die Süsse* (The Sweet), c. 1926, 30 x 15.5 cm., photomontage, Collection: Rössner-Höch, Backnang, Germany

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of the works in the series *Denkmal* (monument), Höch reminds us of the function of a monument as a psychosexual fetish. And in a work such as *Die Süsse* (The Sweet), c. 1926 (fig. 143), a woman seems transformed, playfully, into an ethnographic object and a phallus-shaped fetish. According to Freud's definition of fetishism, the psychosexual fetish is both an object of the male gaze and a figure of denial.³⁴ In the fetishist's mind, a woman (or an object standing for her) is substituted for the missing phallus. This act of objectifying the woman of course negates her identity as a subject.

Combined with the image of tribal sculptures in Höch's Ethnographic Museum series, the female is doubly distanced, doubly marked as "Other." And yet, for female viewers, she is also the site of identification, an uncanny identification of the Other as self. *Die Süsse* is one of many works in the series in which Western body parts are montaged with ethnographic anthropomorphized sculpture: a single eye (a familiar sign of fragmented subjecthood), lips, an oversized hand, and tiny legs in dress shoes are added to a wooden sculpture. In *Die Süsse*, the New Woman is presented as a fetish object on display. It is as if the fetishized woman is dancing on stage, and the bright, multicolored background adds to the theatricality of the display.

The "sweet one's" legs recall the dancing legs Höch added to figures in Berlin Dada montages to signify dance, Dada, and femininity. The tribal entered into the equation at times, as in *Dada-Tanz* (Dada-Dance) 1922 (fig. 20), where an affinity is established between an African man and Dada dance by montaging the man's head and chest with a dress and with dancing legs. In *Masken* (Masks), c. 1924 (fig. 144), one of the figures is also dancing. In these early works and possibly *Die Süsse*, the ethnographic is used to align the Dada "spirit" with the Other and to differentiate it from Western rationality.³⁵

The few images of men in the Ethnographic Museum series tend to be simpler in signification than those of women or androgynous figures. They lack bases and so are without the overt museum reference. They seem to be mere caricatures for whom Höch borrowed from ethnographic objects to provide a masculine costume. *Nummer IX*, c. 1926 and *Hörner* (Nr. X) (Horns [No. 10]) c. 1926 (fig. 145) have anti-militaristic and humorous connotations.³⁶ *Nummer IX* depicts an androgynous pair of standing figures. They wear metal masks, and the one with a moustache carries what appears to be a weapon. This moustachioed figure has female legs and wears women's evening shoes. Any gender ambiguity here is overridden by the ironic feminization of the man, a ploy often used by Höch in her early Dada works. *Hörner* is more straightforward: it consists of a man's somewhat childlike face wearing the top half of a stone sculptural head with horns as headgear. The helmet gives the man a Viking appearance. The montage can appear humorous (chubby cheeks and bulbous nose adorned with a too-large helmet) or, like *Indian Dancer*, *Hörner* can be read as a human being adorned with and partially calcified by a heavy-handed gender role (in the case of *Indian Dancer*, a domestic woman, in the case of *Hörner*, a male warrior).

Similarly, in *Mit Mütze* (With Cap) c. 1925 (fig. 146), a man wears a military role like a mask. His upper face, topped by a cap, is montaged with the lower part of a

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144 Hannah Höch, *Masken: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (Masks: From an Ethnographic Museum), 1929, 25 x 16 cm., photomontage, Collection: Rössner-Höch, Backnang, Germany

somber stone face, giving him the general appearance of a military or police officer.³⁷ The view is three-quarters, and the man's eyes look to the side suspiciously. There is no base or background. *J. B. und sein Engel* (J. B. and his Angel), 1925, is not from this series but is related in that Höch used a tribal sculpture in it to portray Johannes Baader (most likely) and his "angel" allegorically. And finally in *Der heilige Berg* (The Holy Mountain) 1930 (fig. 147), Höch invoked the spirituality believed to be associated with Eastern culture by using two Asian male heads of stone to which she added glasses and what looks like knitted doll clothing for a mocking effect. This pair of male bodies was probably intended as a mild parody of the intense male bonding in the film *Der heilige Berg* that was released in 1927. In this popular film, starring Louis Trenker as a mountaineer and Leni Riefenstahl as the dancer Diotima, the love of the two men (Robert and Franz) for Diotima is a pretext for expressing their love for each other. Their devotion is revealed during their trip up the mountain, when they reestablish their loyalty to each other in a melodrama that ends with their self-sacrificial deaths.



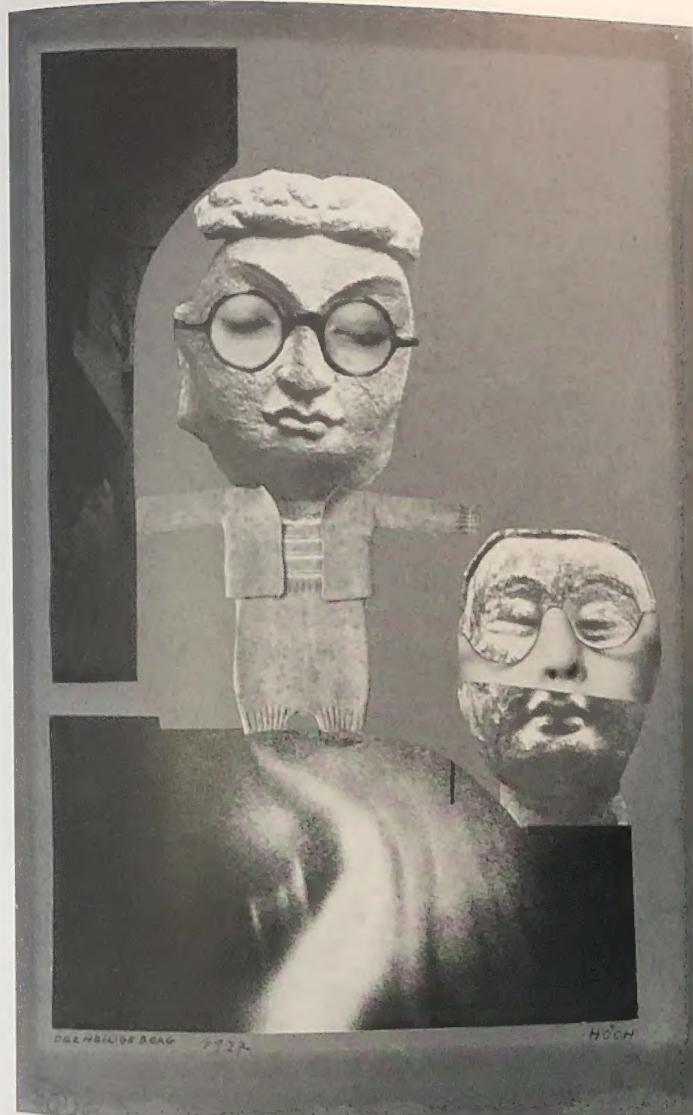
145 Hannah Höch, *Hörner: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum X* (Horns: From an Ethnographic Museum), c. 1926, photomontage, 19.5 x 12.5 cm., Berlinische Galerie, Berlin



146 Hannah Höch, *Mit Mütze: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum IX* (With Cap: From an Ethnographic Museum IX), 1924, 27.5 x 15.5 cm., photomontage, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

On the whole, although these male portraits comment on masculine roles, they lack the shifting and uncanny repetitions and fetish significations of the female figures in the Ethnographic Museum series. In the museum series, Höch used images of women to formulate allegorical montages that demonstrate complex representations of the contexts of gender politics for Weimar Germany's New Woman by connoting the Other, the commodity, and the psychosexual.³⁸

To conclude, I want to return to Höch's *Fremde Schönheit*, which challenges stereotypical representations of the grotesque and the normal, particularly in relation to non-Western cultures. The figure's eyes, which would usually be the site of identification for the female viewer, are located in the face of a grotesque Other. They are also magnified, suggesting an identification with the disfigured face as well as the conventionally beautiful body. The self is re-presented as the Other – revisited and rendered uncanny. Thus, as in other Ethnographic Museum montages, there is a shifting between identification and differentiation with tribal peoples (and the myths attached to their objects on display). By emphasizing this fluctuation, Höch deviated from the nonambiguous, folkloric representation of African and other tribal peoples in the *Illustrierte* and laid the foundation for a critique of racism, even if she did not pursue it further. The series' primary referent is not race, however, but the way race is socially coded in the ethnographic museum. What concerned Höch in these works is the display of culture marked as different – for the Other as well as the self in Höch's photomontages is the modern European woman.



147 Hannah Höch, *Der heilige Berg: Aus einem ethnographischen Museum XII* (The Holy Mountain: From an Ethnographic Museum XII), 1927, 33.7 x 22.5 cm., photomontage, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin